



# Principles of Effective Communication

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Your **mindset** (how you think) influences how you act and determine the outcomes of interpersonal interactions. **Good communication** means developing an **effective mindset** and putting it into practice.

## EFFECTIVE MINDSET



*I have information, so do others.  
Each of us sees things others don't.  
Differences are opportunities for learning.  
I may be contributing to difficulties.  
I have compassion for others' situations.*



## WHAT YOU SAY AND DO

State views and ask genuine questions  
Explain reasoning & intent  
Ask genuine questions  
Share all relevant information  
Check assumptions  
Raise and explore difficult issues  
Uncover the interests or needs of others  
Jointly design next steps



## OUTCOMES OF INTERPERSONAL INTERACTIONS

Fully informed decisions  
Greater commitment to decisions  
Reduced costs  
Greater innovation  
Productive conflict  
Better working relationships  
Reduced stress

## INEFFECTIVE MINDSET



*Only I understand the situation.  
I am right & I will win. Those who disagree are wrong.  
My feelings and behavior are justified.  
I am not contributing to difficulties.  
I don't think about others' situations.*



State views; do not inquire about others' views  
Keep reasoning private; do not explore others' intent  
Ask leading questions  
Control the conversation  
Avoid difficult topics  
Focus on your solution, rather than the group's interests & needs  
Act on assumptions



Less informed decisions  
Low commitment to decisions  
Increased costs  
Less innovation  
Unproductive conflict  
Poor working relationships  
Stress

*Putting the effective mindset into practice means being **curious** and **transparent**, and **focusing on interests and needs** over positions*

## 3 STEPS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

*These practices combine **transparency & curiosity** to guide effective written & oral communication. They allow you to talk openly and directly, and to learn about others and their situations.*

### 1. **STATE YOUR VIEW (TRANSPARENCY):**

Clearly state your opinion, idea, solution, recommendation, or interest. This immediately clarifies the purpose of the conversation.

### 2. **EXPLAIN YOUR REASONING & INTENT (TRANSPARENCY):**

Share relevant information that led to your stated view including feelings, data, perspectives, recommendations, and needs. This helps others understand your statements and actions, and why you hold this view. When your reasoning is not clear, others come to their own conclusions based on their assumptions, which may be incorrect or negative.

### 3. **ASK A QUESTION (CURIOSITY):**

Asking questions allows you to check assumptions, explore difficult issues, gauge reactions, and uncover others' underlying needs and interests. It also invites the sharing of relevant information, makes it more likely you will get a response, and builds commitment.

## EXAMPLES

**State your view:** "We need to move up the date of our next fungicide spray."

**Explain your reasoning:** "We were planning to spray on Friday. However, we have had high powdery mildew pressure since our last spray, and extending the interval further could put us at greater risk for infection."

**Ask a question:** "Do you see any problem with rearranging the vineyard crew's schedule to accommodate an earlier spray?"

**State your view:** "I think we should remove this red blotch-infected block this winter."

**Explain your reasoning:** "I say this because we identified a high percentage of diseased vines in this block, that means the adjacent, newly planted block is at high risk for spread. Removing and replanting the block will be expensive but if we can reduce spread in our vineyard, we can protect our investment and save money in the future."

**Ask a question:** "Do you have any concerns about removing the infected block this winter?"

**State your view:** "I would like to meet with our neighbor to discuss jointly managing this disease."

**Explain your reasoning:** "This is because the latest research shows that this disease requires coordinated management to effectively reduce spread. It would be mutually beneficial for the health of our vineyard and our neighbor's vineyard if we could share data on disease spread and coordinate practices."

**Ask a question:** "Are you willing to support me and join a meeting with our neighbor?"

# HOW TO ASK QUESTIONS EFFECTIVELY

*Practice curiosity by asking questions. This allows you to check assumptions, uncover relevant information, and explore difficult issues. By discovering and considering the underlying needs and interests of all parties involved, you can work together to strengthen commitment and make effective decisions.*

## 1. DO NOT ASK LEADING OR “FAKE” QUESTIONS.

Fake questions start with contradictory words like “wouldn’t”, “couldn’t”, “didn’t”. They assume you are correct, already have the answer, and can easily be interpreted as judgmental and critical. They can make others defensive and lead to low commitment and trust.

## 2. ASK GENUINE QUESTIONS.

Genuine questions start with words like “what”, “how”, or “where”. These questions derive from compassion, demonstrate that you value others’ input, seek to uncover relevant information, and help you learn new things. They strengthen collaboration as they demonstrate that you value input and teamwork.

## 3. EXPLAIN WHY YOU ARE ASKING QUESTIONS.

If you open a conversation with a question, explain why you are asking to maintain transparency.

### EXAMPLES

| Leading or “Fake” question                                                                     | Equivalent genuine question with reasoning explained                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>“Didn’t you think about using a different FRAC group?”</i>                                  | <i>“What do you think about switching to FRAC group 9 for our next spray? I notice you plan to spray a FRAC 3 product, which is the same group we used last time. The resistance mitigation guidelines state that we should rotate FRAC groups.”</i> |
| <i>“You don’t see a problem with the canopy management approach that I suggested, do you?”</i> | <i>“What concerns, if any, do you have about my suggestion for canopy management? I am asking because I think this approach will reduce powdery mildew and Botrytis risk by opening the canopy earlier, but you may have different experience.”</i>  |

### SUGGESTED OPENINGS FOR GENUINE QUESTIONS

|                                    |                                                                              |                          |                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Create shared understanding</b> | Do you see it differently?<br>What is important to you about what I said?    | <b>Determine support</b> | What needs to happen for you to support this approach?<br>What might happen if we don’t do this? |
| <b>Explore reasoning</b>           | What concerns do you have with my idea?<br>What led you to take that action? | <b>General</b>           | Can you tell me more about...?<br>What do you mean by...?                                        |

*The purpose of being curious and transparent in interpersonal interactions is to:*

Avoid arguing about a position or solution. Instead, identify the varying interests and needs of each party so that a solution can be jointly crafted that has broad commitment and accountability. For example, the winemaker needs to maintain fruit quality; the viticulturist needs a healthy vineyard; the owner needs to keep the costs within certain bounds. A jointly crafted solution that considers each of these needs will be more likely to get buy in from all parties.

*If someone asks you a fake question or becomes defensive:*

Approach this as an opportunity or “gift”, as it allows you to explore their underlying interests and needs. It gives you the opportunity to learn about their situation and experiences. Rather than responding in a similar fashion, ask curious, genuine questions to uncover relevant and actionable information to jointly craft a solution.

# MAKING MEETINGS MORE PRODUCTIVE

*Meetings are most productive when participants understand why they are meeting and are prepared for the discussion. Follow these guidelines to make meetings more productive.*

## PRIOR TO OR AT THE START OF A MEETING, DISCUSS THESE TOPICS WITH PARTICIPANTS IN THIS ORDER:

### 1. Purpose of the meeting. This should include:

- a. What you are meeting to discuss e.g., "The purpose of this meeting is to talk about ..."
- b. Why you are meeting e.g., "The reason I want to talk about this is ..."
- c. The outcomes you want by the end of the meeting e.g., "I hope we will achieve ...".

Examples of meeting outcomes are:

- i. *Knowledge or awareness*: "An understanding of...in order to ..."
- ii. *A decision*: "If we are going to change our management practices for this disease"
- iii. *Next steps*: "At least 3 actions we can take to address the problem that everyone can support"
- iv. *A schedule*: "A plan for implementing those actions by ..."

### 2. Process by which the purpose will be achieved in the meeting.

For example, you could propose the following steps: "Let's begin by defining the problem. Then we will write a list of interests that need to be met in whatever action we decide, brainstorm next steps, and agree what we will do, who will do it, and when".

### 3. Meeting content. The specific discussion points to be covered. Rather than a vague list of topics, set them out as questions or detailed statements that tell everyone what information is most relevant. For example:

- a. Agree on a definition of the disease problem
- b. Where is the disease most prevalent? Which areas are greatest concern to meet our production goals?
- c. Do we need to adjust our spray program given the disease outbreak we experienced last season?
- d. How could we improve our canopy management practices to reduce disease risk?
- e. How can we approach our neighbors to coordinate practice?

Jointly design the meeting with participants by asking genuine questions about the meeting plan so they can make modifications, suggestions, and ask for clarification before you begin. For example:

- a. "Does anyone have a different understanding of the purpose of the meeting?"
- b. "Are there any additional outcomes that we should accomplish today?"
- c. "Is there anything else that would be relevant to add to the meeting content?"

## Resources

1. R Schwarz. 2013. Smart leaders, smarter teams. Wiley publishing.
2. F Kofman. 2010. Shifting from unilateral control to mutual learning. Axialent Inc.
3. Additional information on concepts and skills discussed can be found at: [schwarzassociates.com/articles/](https://schwarzassociates.com/articles/)

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